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~~TOP SECRET~~ 13

"Render Unto Caesar"

MISSIONARIES

AND THE CIA

THE CURRENT CONTROVERSY about whether missionaries should or should not give information to US intelligence agencies raises once again the question of the split loyalties of Christians.

To assess the present situation some historical recall is necessary. In the early days of the missionary movement, most missionaries felt no sense of conflict between their identities as citizens of a particular nation and their roles as bearers of the universal good news. Indeed, they often tended to identify the two.

For its part the Government tended to rely in part upon missionaries for information about foreign countries. The US Foreign Service was small, and missionaries frequently had more extensive and better contacts. Many missionaries routinely visited the State Department to be debriefed upon their return to their native country on furlough. One example of this kind of relationship was the large number of foreign service personnel and journalists from a missionary background.

Such a simple combination of roles was increasingly overtaken both by theological analysis and the objections of indigenous Christians on the one hand and by events, most notably the changing world role of the US, on the other hand.

The turning point was World War II. It was then that the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) was formed, which led to the Central Intelligence Agency in 1947. The OSS was the first pure intelligence agency ever established by the United States. This in itself was symptomatic of our emergence as a superpower. Finally, the end of World War II and the beginning of the cold war saw the transformation of US national interests into a world ideological struggle.

The individual whose life symbolizes this change for the missionary was John Birch. (Yes, Virginia, there was a John Birch as well as the John Birch Society.) John Birch was a Baptist missionary in China who served with the US Air Force and later the OSS during World War II; he was killed after

the war ended by a Chinese Communist while leading a patrol of Chinese Nationalists. Despite the fact that his death seems to have been a mistake following a quarrel, he was adopted by Robert Welch and the radical right as the "first martyr" of the coming world struggle.

Clearly, the old easy relationship between US missionaries and their government had undergone a radical transformation, but such changes take time to become apparent. Many missionaries continued to support the old arrangement; some, although increasingly fewer, probably still do. An ever-larger number became critical of US policy and tried to distance themselves from any connection with it. Probably the largest number saw their role as nonpolitical and tried to be friendly with their government, but noninvolved. As US power and influence spread around the world, this last stance became increasingly difficult to maintain. So seemingly "pure" an act as distributing relief supplies is inescapably political in a politicized world.

Each missionary worked out whatever solution he/she could square with personal circumstances and conscience, and it would be pointless (as well as self-righteous) to criticize those individual decisions at this late date. The question remains, what are the guidelines for the future?

The old arrangements are certainly dead, and good riddance. The easy assumption that missionaries are there as Americans whose primary loyalties are to their native country was always bad theology, even though its fatal flaws did not show up until recently. The bland assumptions of President Ford and former CIA Director William Colby in this respect were the attempts of drowning men to grab at any support, as even the new CIA Director, George Bush, has realized.

On the other hand, it is a current wishful misconception to imagine that missionaries can shed their national and cultural identities. Just as missionaries must open themselves to understand and feel other cultures and identities, so must they retain a grasp of their own culture and identity. They must be partly at home in two worlds. Even if they switch nationalities, this dichotomy remains. Improperly handled, leads to schizophrenia; properly handled, it shows how the Christian both appropriates and transcends culture.

A corollary of this truth is that the final decision on the relationship between the individual and his/her government does not rest with the government but with the individual. It is very well, perhaps even wise and proper, to pass bills such as that proposed by Senator Hatfield keeping the

Government off the back of missionaries, but any attempt to erect an absolute wall of separation between a missionary and his/her government is as dubious theologically as it is impractical. The Christian serving abroad is not a government agent but neither does he/she stop being a citizen of his/her country.

Legalism won't do the trick. In terms of government suspicion in other countries, the damage has been done and will take some time to repair, but those who are suspicious will not have their questions miraculously erased by a Government declaration that it will not use missionary information. That's one of the best cover stories one could think up.

This is one of those continuing tensions that Christians must always live with and that they never really can get sorted out neatly. The missionary giving information to the CIA, the missionary leading demonstrations against the US consulate, the missionary seeking to ignore the problem—all are dealing with the problem in their own way. Interestingly enough, the person seeking to escape the question has perhaps less grasp of Christian responsibility than either of the others.

Part of the furor about missionary connections

with the CIA has a positive value. Part of the public shock (vastly overrated by the churches) stems from the old myth of the superhuman missionary, floating serenely above the problems of ordinary mortals. That myth dies hard, but anything that helps to kill it can't be all bad. Of course, most missionaries were never on Government payrolls and loved the countries and the people where they worked far too much to knowingly damage them. To suppose otherwise is to substitute cartoon characters for real people; to replace unthinkingly the cardboard heroes of yesterday with cardboard villains for today.

Neither will do. In working out his/her salvation with diligence, the Christian must constantly try to keep a universal commitment and a particular identity in some sort of balance. The missionary is an exemplar of that tension. The struggle is never easy. It is only through grace that any kind of harmony is ever achieved.

ARTHUR J. MOORE

This viewpoint also appeared in the February issue of New World Outlook, of which Mr. Moore is the editor.



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